



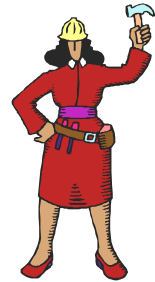
CFSA Fact Sheet



Under Construction

CFSA is Building a Strong Local Safety Net for Children and Families

A CFSA manager and 20-year veteran of the District's child welfare program recently commented, "We've made more improvements in the past two years than we did in the previous decade." Independent authorities, such as the court-appointed monitor at the Center for the Study of Social Policy and the Council for Court Excellence, agree. Since returning to District control in May 2001, the pace of change within the city's new public child protection agency has been swift and unrelenting.



Long-Term, Durable Reform













Among the many child welfare reform initiatives underway throughout the nation, the District's situation has dictated a somewhat unique approach.

- **Stage 1:** The city gutted its long-neglected and badly broken public child protection program under the Department of Human Services and replaced it with **a stand-alone, cabinet-level agency**—the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA).
- **Stage 2:** D.C. Council is establishing **a new legislative foundation** that, when combined with sustained funding, will support a strong local child protection system.
- **Stage 3:** As the newest District agency, CFSA must **build an infrastructure** of trained staff, policies, best practices, management information, business processes, and internal and external relationships that will progressively result in improved outcomes for abused and neglected children and troubled families.
- **Stage 4:** CFSA must maintain the pace of change and demonstrate enough positive results to **sustain political will and financial support for reform** over the long haul.

As experience in other urban areas has shown, child welfare reform is a long-term venture that requires diligence; recognition that while progress can be steady, it will also be incremental; and sustained political will and financial support.

Early Achievements

Following are 12 realities of the District's previous child welfare program and 12 key achievements to date in building a strong local public child protection system.

District child welfare history	District child welfare since May 2001
 <p>Six years of Federal Court receivership</p>	<p>May 2001: Child welfare returned to District control. May 2003: District Court accepted the final Implementation Plan in the LaShawn lawsuit, which established best-practice standards and time frames for ending court involvement in 2007.</p>
 <p>Police investigated reports of child abuse, while child welfare investigated reports of neglect only—a fragmented system unique to the District among systems nationwide. May 2001: Backlog of child neglect investigations was over 800.</p>	<p>CFSA gained legal authority to investigate both child abuse and neglect and established Institutional Investigations to investigate abuse/neglect in out-of-home care settings throughout the city. Backlog has decreased, while quality of investigations is improving.</p>
 <p>Few formal policies and procedures and lack of internal business processes</p>	<p>CFSA established a full management team. Some formal policies in place; others in process. Internal systems and business processes that conform to District regulations and meet agency needs under construction.</p>
 <p>Chronic understaffing, individual caseloads of 80 or more</p>	<p>CFSA exceeded FY03 goal of 300 licensed, case-carrying social workers. Average individual caseload currently at 20.</p>
 <p>Animosity among Child Welfare, the Office of the Corporation Counsel (OCC), and the courts. Limited legal representation of child welfare cases in court.</p>	<p>CFSA, OCC, and the new Family Court cooperate and coordinate. Over 40 OCC attorneys located at CFSA represent all CFSA cases in court.</p>
 <p>Unreliable child welfare information system. Extremely limited information for management purposes.</p>	<p>Several levels of CFSA managers routinely use a variety of reliable management reports.</p>
 <p>No standards for or oversight of congregate care for children and teens</p>	<p>Legislation and regulations for licensing and monitoring of District-based congregate care for children and youth in place. CFSA met deadlines for initial licenses. Enforcement underway through denial of some licenses and other consequences.</p>
 <p>Routine removal of children from their homes and placement in group homes, due to lack of services for families and family-like placement options for children and teens</p>	<p>CFSA is developing alternatives to removing children from home, except when they cannot be safe there. Focus on placement in family settings and dramatic reductions in reliance on group care, especially for young children.</p>
 <p>Children routinely sleeping overnight in the child welfare office</p>	<p>CFSA placement process reforms have eliminated children staying overnight in the office.</p>
 <p>High level of placement disruptions, including routine dropping of children at the child welfare office after hours</p>	<p>CFSA implementation of disruption conferences helps to stabilize placements and avoid disruptions. After-hours on-call teams handle emergencies at night and on weekends.</p>
 <p>Many children growing up in the child welfare system</p>	<p>CFSA has made dramatic increases in kinship placements and adoptions. Cultural change to emphasize permanence for all children and youth is underway. Youth Development program is in place to serve the large number of teens in the system today.</p>
 <p>No resources available to help social workers decide how best to help/treat children and families</p>	<p>CFSA Clinical Practice professionals provide expertise in meeting health/mental health needs of children and families.</p>

Ongoing Challenges

Turning an inadequate child welfare program into a strong public child protection system is a monumental—and extremely worthwhile—challenge. Over the next few years, several issues will require diligent effort to construct the viable safety net District children and families deserve.

- **Cultural change:** Instituting best practices in serving children and families requires changing many long-standing beliefs and the outmoded operating methods that have supported them.
- **Staffing:** While recruiting and especially retaining social workers is an omnipresent challenge in child welfare, instituting best practices within CFSA largely depends on attracting, training, supporting, and keeping qualified staff.
- **Relationships:** While CFSA is primarily responsible for meeting the goals of the court-ordered Implementation Plan in the *LaShawn* lawsuit, many others have key roles to play. All District child-serving agencies, the courts, CFSA contractors and other partners, and the community must actively participate to realize a collective vision of local child welfare reform.
- **Resource development:** Efforts must be made to expand and improve local public, private, and non-profit options for meeting the needs of abused and neglected children and troubled families in the District.
- **Sustained support:** Talking about child welfare reform in New York City, William Bell, commissioner for Children's Services, wrote in the Jan. 21, 2003, *New York Times*: "A desire for quick fixes had to be resisted. Everyone involved had to accept that real reform was a multiyear, multifaceted undertaking." n